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The author's apology

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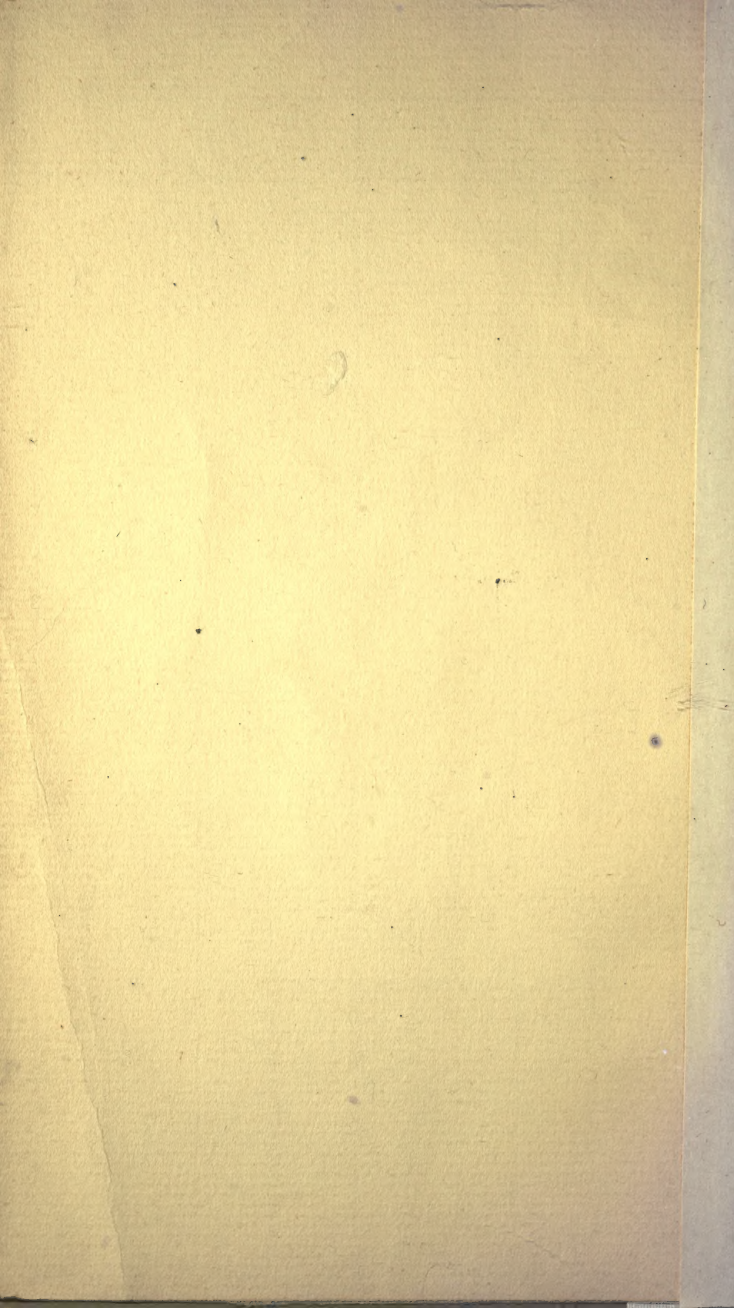


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THE AUTHOR'S  
APOLOGY FROM  
MRS. WARREN'S  
PROFESSION  
BY BERNARD  
HAW WITH AN  
INTRODUCTION  
BY JOHN CORBIN

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## The Author's Apology





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The  
**Author's Apology**

from  
Mrs. Warren's Profession

BY  
BERNARD SHAW

With an Introduction by  
JOHN CORBIN  
The Tyranny of Police  
and Press

NEW YORK  
**BRENTANO'S**  
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# The Tyranny of Police and Press<sup>1</sup>

**A**S an answer to the critics of the press, and to the New York Commissioner of Police, who drove Arnold Daly's production of Mrs. Warren's Profession from the American stage, Mr. Bernard Shaw herewith republishes the "Author's Apology" which he issued in London on a not dissimilar occasion, in January, 1902. As I have questioned the value of the play, both as regards the doctrine it urges and as a work of art, I am not without misgiving as to my fitness to stand sponsor before the American public for the author's defense of it. There are many and prominent Americans who have the advantage of me in thinking well of it. One of our foremost dramatists, Augustus Thomas, thinks this the most vigorous and vital thing Shaw

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<sup>1</sup>Reprinted in part from the New York Sun, November 5, 1905, with permission. When this article was written I had not read Mr. Shaw's Apology.

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has ever done. Professor William Lyon Phelps, who very ably occupies a chair of drama and literature at Yale, thinks that it is not only a good play, but teaches a much needed moral lesson. Mr. Norman Hapgood, once preëminent as a dramatic critic and now as editor of Collier's Weekly, is strong in his approval of both of these views. It is doubtful, however, whether any of these gentlemen could speak with more force and conviction on this subject than Mr. Shaw has done in his Apology. Nor is the value of the play the only point at issue before the American public. This, it seems to me, is the meretricious hypocrisy of the press and the tyrannous bigotry of the police which combined to deprive the stage of its freedom of speech. The very fact that I do not share all the opinions of Mr. Shaw and his faction may perhaps lend weight to the protest which I made at the time, and which I gladly repeat.

Before the production of the play all of the sensational papers, and some that pretend not to be sensational, used column upon column of

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their most prominent space to create an unwarranted expectation of something lewd, and after it used those same columns to falsify what actually happened. The denunciations of the play were hysterical and hypocritical in proportion as the papers were yellow and foul. The blackleg even more than the puritan has motives for holding up the public hand of horror. I quote a statement from the front page of the Herald, which differs from many such only in being briefer and more explicit:

“The play is an insult to decency because—

“It defends immorality.

“It glorifies debauchery.

“It besmirches the sacredness of a clergyman’s calling.

“It pictures children and parents living in calm observance of most unholy relations.”

Is it necessary, even in this year of disgrace, to point out that an author, and most of all a dramatic author, is not to be held responsible for the opinions of his characters? Mrs. Warren defends the career of a prostitute and procuress as better than



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being crushed and brutalized by the modern economic system. But no glamour is thrown about this harlot's life. There is not a trace of the false appeal to sentiment, of the emotional glorification of the courtesan that has so long been applauded in *Camille*. The spirit of sheer, hard actuality is over it and in it all. At the outset of the play Mrs. Warren seems to have one chance of regeneration—in her love for her daughter. But being what she is this is no chance at all. She loses Vivie forever, and sinks irreclaimably into the mire. As a defense of immorality this takes the palm.

As a glorification of debauchery it is even more astonishing. But perhaps the allusion is to Mrs. Warren's aristocratic partner in bawdry, Sir George Crofts? He realizes thirty-five per cent on his business investment, and with the proceeds has soused his soul in all of the seven deadly sins without loss of social standing among county families. To the gentlemen capable of making newspaper capital by creating the present sensation this must indeed seem a glorification.

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As for the sacredness of the clergyman's calling, is it to be besmirched by the depiction of the black sheep in the fold? In point of fact, the Rev. Samuel Gardner belongs to a type that has been notorious in life and rampant in literature for centuries, and never a word of protest. The unholy relations in calm observance of which these parents and children live, I confess, thus far eluded me. Young Gardner openly insults and reprobates his father, and Vivie bids her mother a stern and calm good-by.

One and all the charges are false. Assuming common intelligence on the part of their author, they are intentionally false.

In such a mess of calculated sensationalism and venal hypocrisy it is not strange that the real purport of the play should have escaped notice. Small chance here for that critical honesty which makes an artist's intention the primary basis for judgment as to what he has done! One may search the press in vain for the fact, which should be obvious to the meanest intelligence, that what Shaw

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has written is first and last a tract in socialism. Once grant that the primary right of every human being is wholesome work at a living wage, and the play is not only moral in purpose, but satirically and critically illuminating. As a girl Mrs. Warren gave respectability a fair trial and was denied every chance of material happiness. But all that the virtue of society as organized withheld she snatched from its vices. She didn't want to do this, but she was forced to it, and with the courage of her convictions took the consequences, bitter as they were. Personally I do not think that the dramatist's powers of simple human feeling and his insight into the spiritual depths of life proved adequate to his theme; but if they had done so there can be no doubt that the result would have been a play of artistic value and intellectual power.

That our press, at once the freest in the world and the one that most vilely abuses its freedom, should become an engine to crush the freedom of the stage is grotesquely comic. But what shall we say when our



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police, which generally battens on prostitution, and in spite of the clearest of laws always tolerates it, uses vague and irresponsible powers to prohibit its mere artistic representation? That open scurrility, *The Turtle*, gave rise to a statute against disorderly conduct in the theater, and lo! this is first used to ban a play the intention of which is unmistakably artistic and intellectual. Prostitutes and their patrons, who flourish on the other side of Broadway flagrant and unpunished, go for a vacation from their hard labors to the Garrick, and our Tammany Police Commissioner, McAdoo, transforms himself into dramatic censor and closes the theater to good and bad alike. The disreputable element in the audience goes back to its life in the Tenderloin unmolested, but the actors who dare to discuss that life intellectually and artistically—among them two women of spotless reputation in their private life and in their art—are summoned before the magistrate. “Could anything be more affecting,” a “Woman Stenographer” wrote to the Sun, “than

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the solicitude of Mr. McAdoo? He fairly radiated all twelve of the beatitudes. He saw the white spotlight of virtue hovering near, and plumped himself into its very center."

(And note the serried logic with which Mr. McAdoo justified what he did! "Played at the Academy of Music, on the East Side, or at the Grand Opera House, on the West Side, at popular prices, the effect on public morality would be most pernicious." Admirable this as an excuse for stopping it at one of the most artistic and sophisticated theaters in the city! Mr. McAdoo does not even pretend that the play might be given in the popular houses. "I doubt, however, if the hard-working and plain-minded heads of families in those neighborhoods would permit it to be played." "Doubt" is a mild word. Nothing is more certain than that they would not. In their wildest nightmares, Managers Gilmore, Tompkins, and Springer could not imagine themselves offering their public such a piece. "That the audience last night did not hiss the play off the stage, or engage in mob

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demonstrations against it, was due, I think, to the fact that the audience was not a representative one." Certainly it was not. The play had two appeals—a factitious appeal to prudence, and a real appeal to people of intelligent curiosity. If there had been any demonstration it would have been an outcry of disappointment from those who had been led to think they were to be delighted with lubricity. The one redeeming feature of the occasion was the fate of aspirants who paid the speculators thirty dollars apiece for seats, and when the play was stopped were forced to exchange them at the box office for two dollars.

Mr. McAdoo did not expect any continued popular interest in the Garrick performance. "There was nothing during the evening that could be really called applause." And he has no illusions as to the reason for this. "The whole play, to my personal view, is revolting, indecent, nauseating, where it is not boring." There is a delicate intimation here that the Commissioner of Police was enlivened by its revolting



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indecent, but we will let that pass. He makes it abundantly clear that the audience did not share his mood. In plain terms, the people who paid thirty dollars and saw the play were most beautifully sold. By the Commissioner's own statement the play must have failed, when the false and factitious interest in it was spent. Except for the small public of people genuinely interested in the play, its fate would have been precisely that of innumerable giddy farces ending with Pinero's *Wife Without a Smile*—or of this very same piece when it was played in Germany. To the sense of the general public the play was rankly obnoxious—that was its safeguard. The polecat is his own excuse for being—he makes it so evident that safety lies in flight. Truly it is to laugh when the very reasons which the authorities allege for interfering show so plainly that interference was gratuitous.

“Well, then,” Mr. McAdoo and his henchmen of puritans and black-legs may ask, “what is the harm in adding a perfume to this polecat, especially if the result is to bury him for-

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ever out of reach of the public nostrils?"

The answer is that we live, presumably, in a free and truth-loving land, in which even polecat specialists must have a look in. This happens to be an intelligent polecat, an artistic polecat, a highly interesting polecat, a polecat the like of which never ranged the wilds of Broadway.

"Why shouldn't I butt my head against the wall?" cries the rebellious heroine of *Wheels Within Wheels*. "The wall is open to everybody, and my head is my own!"

So she butted her head and became a wiser and better, if sadder, woman.

Mr. McAdoo avers that some of the scant applause at that premier came from "women actuated by foolish bravado." He misconceived them

and maligned them as grossly as he did the play and its actors. The

thesis at the bottom of the whole

thing is that women have an inalien-

able right to vocations that do not

involve the degradation either of

poverty or of prostitution. Many of

our women, innocent alike of folly

or bravado, sincerely and profoundly

believe this. One such woman, as

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it seems, wrote to the Commissioner protesting that it was not for him to tell her what she should think and do. His reply was to tell her more of what he thought, and scold her for thinking otherwise. He added that she might if she wished go to such plays—a smug sentiment of liberality, after he had closed the doors!

It fares hard with the intelligence, in a mob-ridden democracy, which hates anything above its own conventional judgments. No artist is truly an artist who does not depart from the rigidity of accepted types, who does not stir us from the inert acquiescence in habit and custom, who does not incite us to revolt from the tyranny of the standards of the past. But all the forces of stupidity and hypocrisy are exerted in preventing a dramatist from doing anything different from what has always been done.

The intelligent world is well agreed that Mr. Anthony Comstock is an enemy to true decency and the proper freedom of art. But he has limited his activities for the most part to what strikes the eye or the ear.



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There is no question of vulgar or external indecency here. Mr. McAdoo has put his ban on the motions of the mind and the soul. He has attacked the dearest liberty of our race—the liberty to think for itself, and give public expression to its thought. He has dealt a vital blow at the sacred, the invaluable instinct which prompts able playwrights, actors, and managers to extend the province of their art. He has made himself the arch representative of those standards of stupidity and bigotry which have kept our drama on the lowest plane of intelligence. It is the sort of thing that always happens when questions of æsthetics or of belief are meddled with by the policeman.

In the present case, as it happens, something more is at stake than the freedom of the theater. The socialistic ideas that inspired Mrs. Warren's *Profession* are identical with those that are creating revolutionary ferment in all modern countries. In Europe monarchy and aristocracy are still, for the most part, in power, and have means to check the rising tides

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of revolution. Here, thanks to our more liberal institutions, the ballot gives immediate expression to the will of the people. How strong and pervasive are the forces of the new thought was lately shown in the municipal election in New York. An able socialistic agitator, backed by a large private fortune, has, as it seems, actually elected himself mayor. What he may still do no man can foretell. Only a few years ago another agitator, without any such financial power, made two all but successful campaigns for the presidency of our country. The principles for which he stood were known by well-grounded economists to be as fallacious as they were dangerous to the established order. But such was the appeal to social and economic discontent that it took a decade, and the best energies of the country, to educate the public out of their delusions. The socialism of to-day is backed by many of the keenest intellects; and many of the most conservative thinkers do not deny that certain of its principles are valid. But taken as a whole, or as put in

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practice by a rash popular movement, it would subvert not only the economic but the moral basis of society. Its danger is ten times the danger of free silver, and ten times as difficult to combat. And now, as before, we have only one engine of warfare—an enlightened public opinion.

Mrs. Warren's Profession was an opportunity to show it up in its habit as it lives, with its attractively rational materialism, its alluring offer of moral freedom to the individual, and its repugnance to our deepest racial instincts. The right of the actors to give the play, and of the public to see it, was a minor matter compared with the duty of our intellectual leaders to make us understand it. Placed as we are, to libel socialism and put it under the ban of the police, is only to redouble its power. In England, when the royal ostrich buries its head in the sand its tail feathers still make an imposing impression—many bow down before them and worship them. But the republican ostrich has no tail feathers. When it buries its head the result is an exposure of naked fatuity.





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**M**RS. WARREN'S PROFESSION has been performed at last, after a delay of only eight years; and I have once more shared with Ibsen the triumphant amusement of startling all but the strongest-headed of the London theater critics clean out of the practice of their profession. No author who has ever known the exultation of sending the press into an hysterical tumult of protest, of moral panic, of involuntary and frantic confession of sin, of a horror of conscience in which the power of distinguishing between the work of art on the stage and the real life of the spectator is confused and overwhelmed, will ever care for the stereotyped compliments which every successful farce or melodrama elicits from the newspapers. Give me that critic who has just rushed from my play to declare furiously that Sir George Crofts ought to be kicked. What a triumph for the actor, thus to reduce a jaded London journalist to the condition of the simple sailor in the Wapping gallery, who shouts execrations at Iago and warnings to Othello not to believe him! But dearer still than such simplicity is that sense of the sudden earthquake shock to the

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foundations of morality which sends a pallid crowd of critics into the street shrieking that the pillars of society are cracking and the ruin of the state at hand. Even the Ibsen champions of ten years ago remonstrate with me even as the veterans of those brave days remonstrated with them. Mr. Grein, the hardy iconoclast who first launched my plays on the stage alongside *Ghosts* and *The Wild Duck*, exclaims that I have shattered his ideals. Actually his ideals! What would Dr. Relling say? And Mr. William Archer himself disowns me because I "cannot touch pitch without wallowing in it." Truly my play must be more needed than I knew; and yet I thought I knew how little the others know.

Do not suppose, however, that the consternation of the press reflects any consternation among the general public. Anybody can upset the theater critics, in a turn of the wrist, by substituting for the romantic commonplaces of the stage the moral commonplaces of the pulpit, the platform, or the library. Play Mrs. Warren's *Profession* to an audience of clerical members of the Christian Social Union and of women well experienced in *Rescue*, *Temperance*, and *Girls' Club* work,<sup>1</sup> and no

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<sup>1</sup> Many a specialist of the stalls will shudder at his own dreary conception of such an audience; but I can assure him that he would hardly know where he was on such an occasion, so much more vital would the atmosphere be, and so much jollier and better looking the people.



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moral panic will arise: every man and woman present will know that as long as poverty makes virtue hideous and the spare pocket money of rich bachelordom makes vice dazzling, their daily hand-to-hand fight against prostitution with prayer and persuasion, shelters and scanty alms, will be a losing one. There was a time when they were able to urge that though "the white-lead factory where Anne Jane was poisoned" may be a far more terrible place than Mrs. Warren's house, yet hell is still more dreadful. Nowadays they no longer believe in hell; and the girls among whom they are working know that they do not believe in it, and would laugh at them if they did. So well have the rescuers learnt that Mrs. Warren's defense of herself and indictment of society is the thing that most needs saying, that those who know me personally reproach me, not for writing this play, but for wasting my energies on "pleasant plays" for the amusement of frivolous people, when I can build up such excellent stage sermons on their own work. Mrs. Warren's Profession is the one play of mine which I could submit to a censorship without doubt of the result; only, it must not be the censorship of the minor theater critic, or of an innocent court official like the King's Reader of Plays, much less of people who consciously profit

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by Mrs. Warren's profession, or who personally make use of it, or who hold the widely whispered view that it is an indispensable safety valve for the protection of domestic virtue, or, above all, who are smitten with a sentimental, pitiful affection for our fallen sister, and would "take her up tenderly, lift her with care, fashioned so slenderly, young, and *so fair*." Nor am I prepared to accept the verdict of the medical gentlemen who would compulsorily sanitise and register Mrs. Warren, whilst leaving Mrs. Warren's patrons, especially her military patrons, free to destroy her health and anybody else's without fear of reprisals. But I should be quite content to have my play judged by, say, a joint committee of the Central Vigilance Society and the Salvation Army. And the sterner moralists the members of the committee were, the better.

Some of the journalists I have shocked reason so unripely that they will gather nothing from this but a confused notion that I am accusing the National Vigilance Association and the Salvation Army of complicity in my own scandalous immorality. It will seem to them that people who would stand this play would stand anything. They are quite mistaken. Such an audience as I have described would be revolted by many of our fashionable plays.

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They would leave the theater convinced that the Plymouth Brother who still regards the playhouse as one of the gates of hell is perhaps the safest adviser on the subject of which he knows so little. If I do not draw the same conclusion, it is not because I am one of those who claim that art is exempt from moral obligations, and that the writing or performance of a play is not a moral act, to be treated on exactly the same footing as theft or murder if it produces equally mischievous consequences. I am convinced that fine art is the subtlest, the most seductive, the most effective means of moral propagandism in the world, excepting only the example of personal conduct; and I waive even this exception in favor of the art of the stage, because it works by exhibiting examples of personal conduct made intelligible and moving to crowds of unobservant, unreflecting people to whom real life means nothing. I have pointed out again and again that the influence of the theater in England is growing so great that whilst private conduct, religion, law, science, politics, and morals are becoming more and more theatrical, the theater itself remains impervious to common sense, religion, science, politics, and morals. That is why I fight the theater, not with pamphlets and sermons and treatises, but with plays; and so effective do I



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find the dramatic method that I have no doubt I shall at last persuade even London to take its conscience and its brains with it when it goes to the theater, instead of leaving them at home with its prayer book as it does at present. Consequently, I am the last man in the world to deny that if the net effect of a performance of Mrs. Warren's Profession were an increase in the number of persons entering that profession, its performance should be dealt with accordingly.

Now let us consider how such recruiting can be encouraged by the theater. Nothing is easier. Let the King's Reader of Plays, backed by the press, make an unwritten but perfectly well understood regulation that members of Mrs. Warren's profession shall be tolerated on the stage only when they are beautiful, exquisitely dressed, and sumptuously lodged and fed; also that they shall, at the end of the play, die of consumption to the sympathetic tears of the whole audience, or step into the next room to commit suicide, or at least be turned out by their protectors and passed on to be "redeemed" by old and faithful lovers who have adored them in spite of all their levities. Naturally the poorer girls in the gallery will believe in the beauty, in the exquisite dresses, and the luxurious living, and will see that there is no real

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necessity for the consumption, the suicide, or the ejection: mere pious forms, all of them, to save the Censor's face. Even if these purely official catastrophes carried any conviction, the majority of English girls remain so poor, so dependent, so well aware that the drudgeries of such honest work as is within their reach are likely enough to lead them eventually to lung disease, premature death, and domestic desertion or brutality, that they would still see reason to prefer the primrose path to the strait path of virtue, since both, vice at worst and virtue at best, lead to the same end in poverty and overwork. It is true that the Board School mistress will tell you that only girls of a certain kind will reason in this way. But alas! that certain kind turns out on inquiry to be simply the pretty, dainty kind: that is, the only kind that gets the chance of acting on such reasoning. Read the first report of the Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes (Bluebook C 4402, 8d., 1889); read the Report on Home Industries (sacred word, Home!), issued by the Women's Industrial Council (Home Industries of Women in London, 1897, 1s., 12 Buckingham Street, W. C.); and ask yourself whether, if the lot in life therein described were your lot in life, you would not prefer the lot of Cleopatra, of Theodora, of

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the Lady of the Camellias, of Mrs. Tanqueray, of Zaza, of Iris. If you can go deep enough into things to be able to say no, how many ignorant, half-starved girls will believe you are speaking sincerely? To them the lot of Iris is heavenly in comparison with our own. Yet our King, like his predecessors, says to the dramatist, "Thus, and thus only, shall you present Mrs. Warren's profession on the stage, or you shall starve. Witness Shaw, who told the untempting truth about it, and whom We, by the Grace of God, accordingly disallow and suppress, and do what in Us lies to silence." Fortunately, Shaw cannot be silenced. "The harlot's cry from street to street" is louder than the voices of all the kings. I am not dependent on the theater, and cannot be starved into making my play a standing advertisement of the attractive side of Mrs. Warren's business.

Here I must guard myself against a misunderstanding. It is not the fault of their authors that the long string of wanton's tragedies, from Antony and Cleopatra to Iris, are snares to poor girls, and are objected to on that account by many earnest men and women who consider Mrs. Warren's Profession an excellent sermon. Mr. Pinero is in no way bound to suppress the fact that Iris is a person to be envied by millions of better women. If



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he made his play false to life by inventing fictitious disadvantages for her, he would be acting as unscrupulously as any tract writer. If society chooses to provide for its Irises better than for its working women, it must not expect honest playwrights to manufacture spurious evidence to save its credit. The mischief lies in the deliberate suppression of the other side of the case; the refusal to allow Mrs. Warren to expose the drudgery and repulsiveness of plying for hire among coarse, tedious drunkards; the determination not to let the Parisian girl in Brieux's *Les Avariés* come on the stage and drive into people's minds what her diseases mean for her and for themselves. All that, says the King's Reader in effect, is horrifying, loathsome. Precisely: what does he expect it to be? would he have us represent it as beautiful and gratifying? The answer to this question, I fear, must be a blunt Yes; for it seems impossible to root out of an Englishman's mind the notion that vice is delightful, and that abstention from it is privation. At all events, as long as the tempting side of it is kept towards the public, and softened by plenty of sentiment and sympathy, it is welcomed by our Censor, whereas the slightest attempt to place it in the light of the policeman's lantern or the Salvation Army shelter is checkmated at

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once as not merely disgusting, but, if you please, unnecessary.

Everybody will, I hope, admit that this state of things is intolerable; that the subject of Mrs. Warren's profession must be either tapu altogether, or else exhibited with the warning side as freely displayed as the tempting side. But many persons will vote for a complete tapu, and an impartial clean sweep from the boards of Mrs. Warren and Gretchen and the rest: in short, for banishing the sexual instincts from the stage altogether. Those who think this impossible can hardly have considered the number and importance of the subjects which are actually banished from the stage. Many plays, among them *Lear*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Coriolanus*, *Julius Cæsar*, have no sex complications: the thread of their action can be followed by children who could not understand a single scene of Mrs. Warren's *Profession* or *Iris*. None of our plays rouse the sympathy of the audience by an exhibition of the pains of maternity, as Chinese plays constantly do. Each nation has its particular set of tapus in addition to the common human stock; and though each of these tapus limits the scope of the dramatist, it does not make drama impossible. If Mr. Redford were to refuse to license plays with female characters in them, he would only

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be doing to the stage what our tribal customs already do to the pulpit and the bar. I have myself written a rather entertaining play with only one woman in it, and she quite heartwhole; and I could just as easily write a play without a woman in it at all. I will even go as far as to promise Mr. Redford my support if he will introduce this limitation for part of the year, say during Lent, so as to make a close season for that dullest of stock dramatic subjects, adultery, and force our managers and authors to find out what all great dramatists find out spontaneously: to wit, that people who sacrifice every other consideration to love are as hopelessly unheroic on the stage as lunatics or dipsomaniacs. Hector is the world's hero; not Paris nor Antony.

But though I do not question the possibility of a drama in which love should be as effectively ignored as cholera is at present, there is not the slightest chance of that way out of the difficulty being taken by Mr. Redford. If he attempted it there would be a revolt in which he would be swept away, in spite of my single-handed efforts to defend him. A complete tapu is politically impossible. A complete toleration is equally impossible to Mr. Redford, because his occupation would be gone if there were no tapu to enforce. He is

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therefore compelled to maintain the present compromise of a partial tapu, applied, to the best of his judgment, with a careful respect to persons and to public opinion. And a very sensible English solution of the difficulty, too, most readers will say. I should not dispute it if dramatic poets really were what English public opinion generally assumes them to be during their lifetime: that is, a licentious irregular group to be kept in order in a rough and ready way by a magistrate who will stand no nonsense from them. But I cannot admit that the class represented by Eschylus, Sophocles, Aristophanes, Euripides, Shakespear, Goethe, Ibsen, and Tolstoy, not to mention our own contemporary playwrights, is as much in place in Mr. Redford's office as a pickpocket is in Bow Street. Further, it is not true that the Censorship, though it certainly suppresses Ibsen and Tolstoy, and would suppress Shakespear but for the absurd rule that a play once licensed is always licensed (so that Wycherly is permitted and Shelley prohibited), also suppresses unscrupulous playwrights. I challenge Mr. Redford to mention any extremity of sexual misconduct which any manager in his senses would risk presenting on the London stage that has not been presented under his license and that of his predecessor. The compro-



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mise, in fact, works out in practice in favor of loose plays as against earnest ones.

To carry conviction on this point, I will take the extreme course of narrating the plots of two plays witnessed within the last ten years by myself at London West End theaters, one licensed by the late Queen Victoria's Reader of Plays, the other by the present Reader to the King. Both plots conform to the strictest rules of the period when *La Dame aux Camellias* was still a forbidden play, and when *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* would have been tolerated only on condition that she carefully explained to the audience that when she met Captain Ardale she sinned "but in intention."

Play number one. A prince is compelled by his parents to marry the daughter of a neighboring king, but loves another maiden. The scene represents a hall in the king's palace at night. The wedding has taken place that day; and the closed door of the nuptial chamber is in view of the audience. Inside, the princess awaits her bridegroom. A duenna is in attendance. The bridegroom enters. His sole desire is to escape from a marriage which is hateful to him. An idea strikes him. He will assault the duenna, and get ignominiously expelled from the palace by his indignant father-in-law. To his horror, when he proceeds to carry out this stratagem, the

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duenna, far from raising an alarm, is flattered, delighted, and compliant. The assaulter becomes the assaulted. He flings her angrily to the ground, where she remains placidly. He flies. The father enters; dismisses the duenna; and listens at the keyhole of his daughter's nuptial chamber, uttering various pleasantries, and declaring, with a shiver, that a sound of kissing, which he supposes to proceed from within, makes him feel young again.

In deprecation of the scandalized astonishment with which such a story as this will be read, I can only say that it was not presented on the stage until its propriety had been certified by the chief officer of the Queen of England's household.

Story number two. A German officer finds himself in an inn with a French lady who has wounded his national vanity. He resolves to humble her by committing a rape upon her. He announces his purpose. She remonstrates, implores, flies to the doors and finds them locked, calls for help and finds none at hand, runs screaming from side to side, and, after a harrowing scene, is overpowered and faints. Nothing further being possible on the stage without actual felony, the officer then relents and leaves her. When she recovers, she believes that he has carried out his threat; and during the rest of the play she is repre-

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sented as vainly vowing vengeance upon him, whilst she is really falling in love with him under the influence of his imaginary crime against her. Finally she consents to marry him; and the curtain falls on their happiness.

This story was certified by the present King's Reader, acting for the Lord Chamberlain, as void in its general tendency of "anything immoral or otherwise improper for the stage." But let nobody conclude therefore that Mr. Redford is a monster, whose policy it is to deprave the theater. As a matter of fact, both the above stories are strictly in order from the official point of view. The incidents of sex which they contain, though carried in both to the extreme point at which another step would be dealt with, not by the King's Reader, but by the police, do not involve adultery, nor any allusion to Mrs. Warren's profession, nor to the fact that the children of any polyandrous group will, when they grow up, inevitably be confronted, as those of Mrs. Warren's group are in my play, with the insoluble problem of their own possible consanguinity. In short, by depending wholly on the coarse humors and the physical fascination of sex, they comply with all the formulable requirements of the Censorship, whereas plays in which these humors and fascinations are discarded, and

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the social problems created by sex seriously faced and dealt with, inevitably ignore the official formula and are suppressed. If the old rule against the exhibition of illicit sex relations on the stage were revived, and the subject absolutely barred, the only result would be that Antony and Cleopatra, Othello (because of the Bianca episode), Troilus and Cressida, Henry IV, Measure for Measure, Timon of Athens, La Dame aux Camellias, The Profligate, The Second Mrs. Tanqueray, The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith, The Gay Lord Quex, Mrs. Dane's Defence, and Iris would be swept from the stage, and placed under the same ban as Tolstoy's *Dominion of Darkness* and Mrs. Warren's *Profession*, whilst such plays as the two described above would have a monopoly of the theater as far as sexual interest is concerned.

What is more, the repulsiveness of the worst of these certified plays would protect the Censorship against effective exposure and criticism. Not long ago an American Review of high standing asked me for an article on the Censorship of the English Stage. I replied that such an article would involve passages too disagreeable for publication in a magazine for general family reading. The editor persisted nevertheless; but not until he had declared his readiness to face this, and had pledged



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himself to insert the article unaltered (the particularity of the pledge extending even to a specification of the exact number of words in the article) did I consent to the proposal. What was the result? The editor, confronted with the two stories given above, threw his pledge to the winds, and, instead of returning the article, printed it with the illustrative examples omitted, and nothing left but the argument from political principles against the Censorship. In doing this he fired my broadside after withdrawing the cannon balls; for neither the Censor nor any other Englishman, except perhaps Mr. Leslie Stephen and a few other veterans of the dwindling old guard of Benthamism, cares a dump about political principle. The ordinary Briton thinks that if every other Briton is not under some form of tutelage, the more childish the better, he will abuse his freedom viciously. As far as its principle is concerned, the Censorship is the most popular institution in England; and the playwright who criticises it is slighted as a blackguard agitating for impunity. Consequently nothing can really shake the confidence of the public in the lord chamberlain's department except a remorseless and unbowdlerized narration of the licentious fictions which slip through its net, and are hallmarked by it with the approval of the

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Throne. But since these narrations cannot be made public without great difficulty, owing to the obligation an editor is under not to deal unexpectedly with matters that are not *virginibus puerisque*, the chances are heavily in favor of the Censor escaping all remonstrance. With the exception of such comments as I was able to make in my own critical articles in the *World* and the *Saturday Review* when the pieces I have described were first produced, and a few ignorant protests by churchmen against much better plays which they confessed they had not seen nor read, nothing has been said in the press that could seriously disturb the easy-going notion that the stage would be much worse than it admittedly is but for the vigilance of the King's Reader. The truth is, that no manager would dare produce on his own responsibility the pieces he can now get royal certificates for at two guineas per piece.

I hasten to add that I believe these evils to be inherent in the nature of all censorship, and not merely a consequence of the form the institution takes in London. No doubt there is a staggering absurdity in appointing an ordinary clerk to see that the leaders of European literature do not corrupt the morals of the nation, and to restrain Sir Henry Irving, as a rogue and a vagabond, from presuming to imperson-

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ate Samson or David on the stage, though any other sort of artist may daub these scriptural figures on a signboard or carve them on a tombstone without hindrance. If the General Medical Council, the Royal College of Physicians, the Royal Academy of Arts, the Incorporated Law Society, and Convocation were abolished, and their functions handed over to Mr. Redford, the Concert of Europe would presumably declare England mad and treat her accordingly. Yet, though neither medicine nor painting nor law nor the church molds the character of the nation as potently as the theater does, nothing can come on the stage unless its dimensions admit of its first passing through Mr. Redford's mind! Pray do not think that I question Mr. Redford's honesty. I am quite sure that he sincerely thinks me a blackguard, and my play a grossly improper one, because, like Tolstoy's *Dominion of Darkness*, it produces, as they are both meant to produce, a very strong and very painful impression of evil. I do not doubt for a moment that the rapine play which I have described, and which he licensed, was quite incapable in manuscript of producing any particular effect on his mind at all, and that when he was once satisfied that the ill-conducted hero was a German and not an English officer, he passed the play without study-

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ing its moral tendencies. Even if he had undertaken that study, there is no more reason to suppose that he is a competent moralist than there is to suppose that I am a competent mathematician. But truly it does not matter whether he is a moralist or not. Let nobody dream for a moment that what is wrong with the Censorship is the shortcoming of the gentleman who happens at any moment to be acting as Censor. Replace him to-morrow by an Academy of Letters and an Academy of Dramatic Poetry, acting in concert with the proposed new Academy, and the new and enlarged filter will still exclude original and epoch-making work, whilst passing conventional, old-fashioned, and vulgar work without question. The conclave which compiles the index of the Roman Catholic Church is the most august, ancient, learned, famous, and authoritative censorship in Europe. Is it more enlightened, more liberal, more tolerant than the comparatively infinitesimal office of the Lord Chamberlain? On the contrary, it has reduced itself to a degree of absurdity which makes a Catholic university a contradiction in terms. All censorships exist to prevent anyone from challenging current conceptions and existing institutions. All progress is initiated by challenging current conceptions, and executed by supplanting existing institutions.



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Consequently the first condition of progress is the removal of censorships. There is the whole case against censorships in a nutshell.

It will be asked whether theatrical managers are to be allowed to produce what they like, without regard to the public interest. But that is not the alternative. The managers of our London music halls are not subject to any censorship. They produce their entertainments on their own responsibility, and have no two-guinea certificates to plead if their houses are conducted viciously. They know that if they lose their character, the County Council will simply refuse to renew their license at the end of the year; and nothing in the history of popular art is more amazing than the improvement in music halls that this simple arrangement has produced within a few years. Place the theaters on the same footing, and we shall promptly have a similar revolution: a whole class of frankly blackguardly plays, in which unscrupulous low comedians attract crowds to gaze at be vies of girls who have nothing to exhibit but their prettiness, will vanish like the obscene songs which were supposed to enliven the squalid dullness, incredible to the younger generation, of the music halls fifteen years ago. On the other hand, plays which treat sex questions as problems for thought instead of as aphrodisiacs will be freely per-

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formed. Gentlemen of Mr. Redford's way of thinking will have plenty of opportunity of protesting against them in Council; but the result will be that Mr. Redford will find his natural level; Ibsen and Tolstoy theirs; so no harm will be done.

This question of the Censorship reminds me that I have to apologize to those who went to the recent performance of Mrs. Warren's Profession expecting to find it what I have just called an aphrodisiac. That was not my fault: it was Mr. Redford's. After the specimens I have given of the tolerance of his department, it was natural enough for thoughtless people to infer that a play which overstepped his indulgence must be a very exciting play indeed. Accordingly, I find one critic so explicit as to the nature of his disappointment as to say candidly that "such airy talk as there is upon the matter is utterly unworthy of acceptance as being a representation of what people with blood in them think or do on such occasions." Thus am I crushed between the upper millstone of Mr. Redford, who thinks me a libertine, and the nether popular critic, who thinks me a prude. Critics of all grades and ages, middle-aged fathers of families no less than ardent young enthusiasts, are equally indignant with me. They revile me as lacking in passion, in feeling, in manhood.

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Some of them even sum the matter up by denying me any dramatic power: a melancholy betrayal of what dramatic power has come to mean on our stage under the Censorship! Can I be expected to refrain from laughing at the spectacle of a number of respectable gentlemen lamenting because a playwright lures them to the theater by a promise to excite their senses in a very special and sensational manner, and then, having successfully trapped them in exceptional numbers, proceeds to ignore their senses and ruthlessly improve their minds? But I protest again that the lure was not mine. The play had been in print for four years; and I have spared no pains to make known that my plays are built to induce, not voluptuous reverie but intellectual interest, not romantic rhapsody but humane concern. Accordingly, I do not find those critics who are gifted with intellectual appetite and political conscience complaining of want of dramatic power. Rather do they protest, not altogether unjustly, against a few relapses into staginess and caricature which betray the young playwright and the old playgoer in this early work of mine. As to the voluptuaries, I can assure them that the playwright, whether he be myself or another, will always disappoint them. The drama can do little to delight the senses: all the apparent

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instances to the contrary are instances of the personal fascination of the performers. The drama of pure feeling is no longer in the hands of the playwright: it has been conquered by the musician, after whose enchantments all the verbal arts seem cold and tame. Romeo and Juliet with the loveliest Juliet is dry, tedious, and rhetorical in comparison with Wagner's Tristan, even though Isolde be both fourteen stone and forty, as she often is in Germany. Indeed, it needed no Wagner to convince the public of this. The voluptuous sentimentality of Gounod's Faust and Bizet's Carmen has captured the common playgoer; and there is, flatly, no future now for any drama without music except the drama of thought. The attempt to produce a genus of opera without music—and this absurdity is what our fashionable theaters have been driving at for a long time past without knowing it—is far less hopeful than my own determination to accept problem as the normal material of the drama.

That this determination will throw me into a long conflict with our theater critics, and with the few playgoers who go to the theater as often as the critics, I well know; but I am too well equipped for the strife to be deterred by it, or to bear malice towards the losing side. In trying to produce the sensuous effects of opera, the



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fashionable drama has become so flaccid in its sentimentality, and the intellect of its frequenters so atrophied by disuse, that the reintroduction of problem, with its remorseless logic and iron framework of fact, inevitably produces at first an overwhelming impression of coldness and inhuman rationalism. But this will soon pass away. When the intellectual muscle and moral nerve of the critics has been developed in the struggle with modern problem plays, the pettish luxuriousness of the clever ones, and the sulky sense of disadvantaged weakness in the sentimental ones, will clear away; and it will be seen that only in the problem play is there any real drama, because drama is no mere setting up of the camera to nature: it is the presentation in parable of the conflict between Man's will and his environment: in a word, of problem. The vapidness of such drama as the pseudo-operatic plays contain lies in the fact that in them animal passion, sentimentally diluted, is shown in conflict, not with real circumstances, but with a set of conventions and assumptions half of which do not exist off the stage, whilst the other half can either be evaded by a pretense of compliance or defied with complete impunity by any reasonably strong-minded person. Nobody can feel that such conventions are really compulsory; and consequently no-

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body can believe in the stage pathos that accepts them as an inexorable fate, or in the genuineness of the people who indulge in such pathos. Sitting at such plays we do not believe: we make believe. And the habit of make believe becomes at last so rooted that criticism of the theater insensibly ceases to be criticism at all, and becomes more and more a chronicle of the fashionable enterprises of the only realities left on the stage: that is, the performers in their own persons. In this phase the playwright who attempts to revive genuine drama produces the disagreeable impression of the pedant who attempts to start a serious discussion at a fashionable at-home. Later on, when he has driven the tea services out and made the people who had come to use the theater as a drawing-room understand that it is they and not the dramatists who are the intruders, he has to face the accusation that his plays ignore human feeling, an illusion produced by that very resistance of fact and law to human feeling which creates drama. It is the *deus ex machina* who, by suspending that resistance, makes the fall of the curtain an immediate necessity, since drama ends exactly where resistance ends. Yet the introduction of this resistance produces so strong an impression of heartlessness nowadays that a distinguished critic has

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summed up the impression made on him by Mrs. Warren's Profession, by declaring that "the difference between the spirit of Tolstoy and the spirit of Mr. Shaw is the difference between the spirit of Christ and the spirit of Euclid." But the epigram would be as good if Tolstoy's name were put in place of mine and D'Annunzio's in place of Tolstoy's. At the same time I accept the enormous compliment to my reasoning powers with sincere complacency; and I promise my flatterer that when he is sufficiently accustomed to and therefore undazzled by problem on the stage to be able to attend to the familiar factor of humanity in it as well as to the unfamiliar one of a real environment, he will both see and feel that Mrs. Warren's Profession is no mere theorem, but a play of instincts and temperaments in conflict with each other and with a flinty social problem that never yields an inch to mere sentiment.

I go further than this. I declare that the real secret of the cynicism and inhumanity of which shallower critics accuse me is the unexpectedness with which my characters behave like human beings, instead of conforming to the romantic logic of the stage. The axioms and postulates of that dreary mimanthropometry are so well known that it is almost impossible for its slaves to write tolerable last acts to their

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plays, so conventionally do their conclusions follow from their premises. Because I have thrown this logic ruthlessly overboard, I am accused of ignoring, not stage logic, but, of all things, human feeling. People with completely theatrified imaginations tell me that no girl would treat her mother as Vivie Warren does, meaning that no stage heroine would in a popular sentimental play. They say this just as they might say that no two straight lines would inclose a space. They do not see how completely inverted their vision has become even when I throw its preposterousness in their faces, as I repeatedly do in this very play. Praed, the sentimental artist (fool that I was not to make him a playwright instead of an architect!), burlesques them by anticipating all through the piece that the feelings of the others will be logically deducible from their family relationships and from his "conventionally unconventional" social code. The sarcasm is lost on the critics: they, saturated with the same logic, only think him the sole sensible person on the stage. Thus it comes about that the more completely the dramatist is emancipated from the illusion that men and women are primarily reasonable beings, and the more powerfully he insists on the ruthless indifference of their great dramatic antagonist, the external world, to their



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whims and emotions, the surer he is to be denounced as blind to the very distinction on which his whole work is built. Far from ignoring idiosyncrasy, will, passion, impulse, whim, as factors in human action, I have placed them so nakedly on the stage that the elderly citizen, accustomed to see them clothed with the veil of manufactured logic about duty, and to disguise even his own impulses from himself in this way, finds the picture as unnatural as Carlyle's suggested painting of Parliament sitting without its clothes.

I now come to those critics who, intellectually baffled by the problem in Mrs. Warren's Profession, have made a virtue of running away from it. I will illustrate their method by a quotation from Dickens, taken from the fifth chapter of *Our Mutual Friend*:

"Hem!" began Wegg. "This, Mr. Boffin and Lady, is the first chapter of the first wollume of the Decline and Fall off ——" here he looked hard at the book, and stopped.

"What's the matter, Wegg?"

"Why, it comes into my mind, do you know, sir," said Wegg with an air of insinuating frankness (having first again looked hard at the book), "that you made a little mistake this

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morning, which I had meant to set you right in; only something put it out of my head. I think you said Rooshan Empire, sir?"

"It is Rooshan; ain't it, Wegg?"

"No, sir. Roman. Roman."

"What's the difference, Wegg?"

"The difference, sir?" Mr. Wegg was faltering and in danger of breaking down, when a bright thought flashed upon him. "The difference, sir? There you place me in a difficulty, Mr. Boffin. Suffice it to observe, that the difference is best postponed to some other occasion when Mrs. Boffin does not honor us with her company. In Mrs. Boffin's presence, sir, we had better drop it."

Mr. Wegg thus came out of his disadvantage with quite a chivalrous air, and not only that, but by dint of repeating with a manly delicacy, "In Mrs. Boffin's presence, sir, we had better drop it!" turned the disadvantage on Boffin, who felt that he had committed himself in a very painful manner.

I am willing to let Mr. Wegg drop it on these terms, provided I am allowed to mention here that Mrs. Warren's Profession is a play for women; that it was written for

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women; that it has been performed and produced mainly through the determination of women that it should be performed and produced; that the enthusiasm of women made its first performance excitingly successful; and that not one of these women had any inducement to support it except their belief in the timeliness and the power of the lesson the play teaches. Those who were "surprised to see ladies present" were men; and when they proceeded to explain that the journals they represented could not possibly demoralize the public by describing such a play, their editors cruelly devoted the space saved by their delicacy to an elaborate and respectful account of the progress of a young lord's attempt to break the bank at Monte Carlo. A few days sooner Mrs. Warren would have been crowded out of their papers by an exceptionally abominable police case. I do not suggest that the police case should have been suppressed; but neither do I believe that regard for public morality had anything to do with their failure to grapple with the performance by the Stage Society. And, after all, there was no need to fall back on Silas Wegg's subterfuge. Several critics saved the faces of their papers easily enough by the simple expedient of saying all they had to say in the tone of a shocked governess lecturing a naughty child. To

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them I might plead, in Mrs. Warren's words, "Well, it's only good manners to be ashamed, dearie;" but it surprises me, recollecting as I do the effect produced by Miss Fanny Brough's delivery of that line, that gentlemen who shivered like violets in a zephyr as it swept through them, should so completely miss the full width of its application as to go home and straightway make a public exhibition of mock modesty.

My old Independent Theater manager, Mr. Grein, besides that reproach to me for shattering his ideals, complains that Mrs. Warren is not wicked enough, and names several romancers who would have clothed her black soul with all the terrors of tragedy. I have no doubt they would; but if you please, my dear Grein, that is just what I did not want to do. Nothing would please our sanctimonious British public more than to throw the whole guilt of Mrs. Warren's profession on Mrs. Warren herself. Now, the whole aim of my play is to throw that guilt on the British public itself. You may remember that when you produced my first play, *Widowers' Houses*, exactly the same misunderstanding arose. When the virtuous young gentleman rose up in wrath against the slum landlord, the slum landlord very effectually showed him that slums are the product, not of individual Harpagons,



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but of the indifference of virtuous young gentlemen to the condition of the city they live in, provided they live at the west end of it on money earned by somebody else's labor. The notion that prostitution is created by the wickedness of Mrs. Warren is as silly as the notion—prevalent, nevertheless, to some extent in Temperance circles—that drunkenness is created by the wickedness of the publican. Mrs. Warren is not a whit a worse woman than the reputable daughter who cannot endure her. Her indifference to the ultimate social consequences of her means of making money, and her discovery of that means by the ordinary method of taking the line of least resistance to getting it, are too common in English society to call for any special remark. Her vitality, her thrift, her energy, her outspokenness, her wise care of her daughter, and the managing capacity which has enabled her and her sister to climb from the fried fish shop down by the mint to the establishments of which she boasts, are all high English social virtues. Her defense of herself is so overwhelming that it provokes the St. James's Gazette to declare that "the tendency of the play is wholly evil," because "it contains one of the boldest and most specious defenses of an immoral life for poor women that has ever been penned." Happily the St. James's

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Gazette here speaks in its haste. Mrs. Warren's defense of herself is not only bold and specious, but valid and unanswerable. But it is no defense at all of the vice which she organizes. It is no defense of an immoral life to say that the alternative offered by society collectively to poor women is a miserable life, starved, overworked, fetid, ailing, ugly. Though it is quite natural and *right* for Mrs. Warren to choose what is, according to her lights, the least immoral alternative, it is none the less infamous of society to offer such alternatives. For the alternatives offered are not morality and immorality, but two sorts of immorality. The man who cannot see that starvation, overwork, dirt, and disease are as immoral as prostitution—that they are the vices and crimes of a nation, and not merely its misfortunes—is (to put it as politely as possible) a hopelessly Private Person.

The notion that Mrs. Warren must be a fiend is only an example of the violence and passion which the slightest reference to sex rouses in undisciplined minds, and which makes it seem natural to our lawgivers to punish silly and negligible indecencies with a ferocity unknown in dealing with, for example, ruinous financial swindling. Had my play been entitled Mr. Warren's Profession, and Mr. Warren been a book-

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maker, nobody would have expected me to make him a villain as well. Yet gambling is a vice, and bookmaking an institution, for which there is absolutely nothing to be said. The moral and economic evil done by trying to get other people's money without working for it (and this is the essence of gambling) is not only enormous but uncompensated. There are no two sides to the question of gambling, no circumstances which force us to tolerate it lest its suppression lead to worse things, no consensus ~~of opinion~~ among responsible classes, such as magistrates and military commanders, that it is a necessity, no Athenian records of gambling made splendid by the talents of its professors, no contention that instead of violating morals it only violates a legal institution which is in many respects oppressive and unnatural, no possible plea that the instinct on which it is founded is a vital one. Prostitution can confuse the issue with all these excuses; gambling has none of them. Consequently, if Mrs. Warren must needs be a demon, the bookmaker must be a cacodemon. Well, does anybody who knows the sporting world really believe that bookmakers are worse than their neighbors? On the contrary, they have to be a good deal better; for in that world nearly everybody whose social rank does not exclude such an occu-

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pation would be a bookmaker if he could; but the strength of character required for handling large sums of money and for strict settlements and unflinching payment of losses is so rare that successful bookmakers are rare too. It may seem that at least public spirit cannot be one of a bookmaker's virtues; but I can testify from personal experience that excellent public work is done with money subscribed by bookmakers. It is true that there are abysses in bookmaking: for example, welshing. Mr. Grein hints that there are abysses in Mrs. Warren's profession also. So there are in every profession: the error lies in supposing that every member of them sounds these depths. I sit on a public body which prosecutes Mrs. Warren zealously; and I can assure Mr. Grein that she is often leniently dealt with because she has conducted her business "respectably," and held herself above its vilest branches. The degrees in infamy are as numerous and as scrupulously observed as the degrees in the peerage: the moralist's notion that there are depths at which the moral atmosphere ceases is as delusive as the rich man's notion that there are no social jealousies or snobberies among the very poor. No: had I drawn Mrs. Warren as a fiend in human form, the very people who now rebuke me for flattering her would probably be the



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first to deride me for deducing character logically from occupation instead of observing it accurately in society.

One critic is so enslaved by this sort of logic that he calls my portraiture of the Rev. Samuel Gardner an attack on religion. According to this view Subaltern Iago is an attack on the army, Sir John Falstaff an attack on knighthood, and King Claudius an attack on royalty. Here again the clamor for naturalness and human feeling, raised by so many critics when they are confronted by the real thing on the stage, is really a clamor for the most mechanical and superficial sort of logic. The dramatic reason for making the clergyman what Mrs. Warren calls "an old stick-in-the-mud," whose son, in spite of much capacity and charm, is a cynically worthless member of society, is to set up a mordant contrast between him and the woman of infamous profession, with her well-brought-up, straightforward, hard-working daughter. The critics who have missed the contrast have doubtless observed often enough that many clergymen are in the church through no genuine calling, but simply because, in circles which can command preferment, it is the refuge of "the fool of the family"; and that clergymen's sons are often conspicuous reactionists against the restraints imposed on them in

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childhood by their father's profession. These critics must know, too, from history if not from experience, that women as unscrupulous as Mrs. Warren have distinguished themselves as administrators and rulers, both commercially and politically. But both observation and knowledge are left behind when journalists go to the theater. Once in their stalls, they assume that it is "natural" for clergymen to be saintly, for soldiers to be heroic, for lawyers to be hard-hearted, for sailors to be simple and generous, for doctors to perform miracles with little bottles, and for Mrs. Warren to be a beast and a demon. All this is not only not natural, but not dramatic. A man's profession only enters into the drama of his life when it comes into conflict with his nature. The result of this conflict is tragic in Mrs. Warren's case, and comic in the clergyman's case (at least we are savage enough to laugh at it); but in both cases it is illogical, and in both cases natural. I repeat, the critics who accuse me of sacrificing nature to logic are so sophisticated by their profession that to them logic is nature, and nature absurdity.

Many friendly critics are too little skilled in social questions and moral discussions to be able to conceive that respectable gentlemen like themselves, who would instantly call the police to remove Mrs.

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Warren if she ventured to canvass them personally, could possibly be in any way responsible for her proceedings. They remonstrate sincerely, asking me what good such painful exposures can possibly do. They might as well ask what good Lord Shaftesbury did by devoting his life to the exposure of evils (by no means yet remedied) compared to which the worst things brought into view or even into surmise in this play are trifles. The good of mentioning them is that you make people so extremely uncomfortable about them that they finally stop blaming "human nature" for them, and begin to support measures for their reform. Can anything be more absurd than the copy of the *Echo* which contains a notice of the performance of my play? It is edited by a gentleman who, having devoted his life to work of the Shaftesbury type, exposes social evils and clamors for their reform in every column except one; and that one is occupied by the declaration of the paper's kindly theater critic, that the performance left him "wondering what useful purpose the play was intended to serve." The balance has to be redressed by the more fashionable papers, which usually combine capable art criticism with West End solecism on politics and sociology. It is very noteworthy, however, on comparing the press explosion

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produced by Mrs. Warren's Profession in 1902 with that produced by Widowers' Houses about ten years earlier, that whereas in 1892 the facts were frantically denied and the persons of the drama flouted as monsters of wickedness, in 1902 the facts are admitted, and the characters recognized, though it is suggested that this is exactly why no gentleman should mention them in public. Only one writer has ventured to imply this time that the poverty mentioned by Mrs. Warren has since been quietly relieved, and need not have been dragged back to the footlights. I compliment him on his splendid mendacity, in which he is unsupported, save by a little plea in a theatrical paper which is innocent enough to think that ten guineas a year with board and lodging is an impossibly low wage for a barmaid. It goes on to cite Mr. Charles Booth as having testified that there are many laborers' wives who are happy and contented on eighteen shillings a week. But I can go further than that myself. I have seen an Oxford agricultural laborer's wife looking cheerful on eight shillings a week; but that does not console me for the fact that agriculture in England is a ruined industry. If poverty does not matter as long as it is contented, then crime does not matter as long as it is unscrupulous. The truth is that it is only



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then that it does matter most desperately. Many persons are more comfortable when they are dirty than when they are clean; but that does not recommend dirt as a national policy.

Here I must for the present break off my arduous work of educating the press. We shall resume our studies later on; but just now I am tired of playing the preceptor; and the eager thirst of my pupils for improvement does not console me for the slowness of their progress. Besides, I must reserve space to gratify my own vanity and do justice to the six artists who acted my play, by placing on record the hitherto unchronicled success of the first representation. It is not often that an author, after a couple of hours of those rare alternations of excitement and intensely attentive silence which only occur in the theater when actors and audience are reacting on one another to the utmost, is able to step on the stage and apply the strong word genius to the representation with the certainty of eliciting an instant and overwhelming assent from the audience. That was my good fortune on the afternoon of Sunday, the fifth of January last. I was certainly extremely fortunate in my interpreters in the enterprise, and that not alone in respect of their artistic talent; for had it not been for their superhuman patience, their

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imperturbable good humor and good fellowship, there could have been no performance. The terror of the Censor's power gave us trouble enough to break up any ordinary commercial enterprise. Managers promised and even engaged their theaters to us after the most explicit warnings that the play was unlicensed, and at the last moment suddenly realized that Mr. Redford had their livelihoods in the hollow of his hand, and backed out. Over and over again the date and place were fixed and the tickets printed, only to be canceled, until at last the desperate and overworked manager of the Stage Society could only laugh, as criminals broken on the wheel used to laugh at the second stroke. We rehearsed under great difficulties. Christmas pieces and plays for the new year were being prepared in all directions; and my six actor colleagues were busy people, with engagements in these pieces in addition to their current professional work every night. On several raw winter days stages for rehearsal were unattainable even by the most distinguished applicants; and we shared corridors and saloons with them whilst the stage was given over to children in training for Boxing night. At last we had to rehearse at an hour at which no actor or actress has been out of bed within the memory of man; and we sardonically

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congratulated one another every morning on our rosy matutinal looks and the improvement wrought by early rising in our healths and characters. And all this, please observe, for a society without treasury or commercial prestige, for a play which was being denounced in advance as unmentionable, for an author without influence at the fashionable theaters! I victoriously challenge the West End managers to get as much done for interested motives, if they can.

Three causes made the production the most notable that has fallen to my lot. First, the veto of the Censor, which put the supporters of the play on their mettle. Second, the chivalry of the Stage Society, which, in spite of my urgent advice to the contrary, and my demonstration of the difficulties, dangers, and expenses the enterprise would cost, put my discouragements to shame and resolved to give battle at all costs to the attempt of the Censorship to suppress the play. Third, the artistic spirit of the actors, who made the play their own and carried it through triumphantly in spite of a series of disappointments and annoyances much more trying to the dramatic temperament than mere difficulties.

The acting, too, required courage and character as well as skill and intelligence.

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The veto of the Censor introduced a quite novel element of moral responsibility into the undertaking. And the characters were very unusual on the English stage. The younger heroine is, like her mother, an Englishwoman to the backbone, and not, like the heroines of our fashionable drama, a prima donna of Italian origin. Consequently she was sure to be denounced as unnatural and undramatic by the critics. The most vicious man in the play is not in the least a stage villain: indeed, he regards his own moral character with the sincere complacency of a hero of melodrama. The amiable devotee of romance and beauty is shown at an age which brings out the futilization which these worships are apt to produce if they are made the staple of life instead of the sauce. The attitude of the clever young people to their elders is faithfully presented as one of pitiless ridicule and unsympathetic criticism, and forms a spectacle incredible to those who, when young, were not cleverer than their nearest elders, and painful to those sentimental parents who shrink from the cruelty of youth, which pardons nothing because it knows nothing. In short, the characters and their relations are of a kind that the routine critic has not yet learned to place; so that their misunderstanding was a foregone conclusion. Nevertheless, there



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was no hesitation behind the curtain. When it went up at last, a stage much too small for the company was revealed to an auditorium much too small for the audience. But the players, though it was impossible for them to forget their own discomfort, at once made the spectators forget theirs. It certainly was a model audience, responsive from the first line to the last; and it got no less than it deserved in return.

I grieve to have to add that the second performance, given for the edification of the London press and of those members of the Stage Society who cannot attend the Sunday performances, was a less inspiring one than the first. A solid phalanx of theater-weary journalists in an afternoon humor, most of them committed to irreconcilable disparagement of problem plays, and all of them bound by etiquette to be as undemonstrative as possible, is not exactly the sort of audience that rises at the performers and cures them of the inevitable reaction after an excitingly successful first night. The artist nature is a sensitive and therefore a vindictive one; and masterful players have a way with recalcitrant audiences of rubbing a play into them instead of delighting them with it. I should describe the second performance of *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, especially as to its earlier stages, as decidedly a rubbed-in one.

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The rubbing was no doubt salutary; but it must have hurt some of the thinner skins. The charm of the lighter passages fled; and the strong scenes, though they again carried everything before them, yet discharged that duty in a grim fashion, doing execution on the enemy rather than moving them to repentance and confession. Still, to those who had not seen the first performance, the effect was sufficiently impressive; and they had the advantage of witnessing a fresh development in Mrs. Warren, who, artistically jealous, as I took it, of the overwhelming effect of the end of the second act on the previous day, threw herself into the fourth act in quite a new way, and achieved the apparently impossible feat of surpassing herself. The compliments paid to Miss Fanny Brough by the critics, eulogistic as they are, are the compliments of men three-fourths duped as Partridge was duped by Garrick. By much of her acting they were so completely taken in that they did not recognize it as acting at all. Indeed, none of the six players quite escaped this consequence of their own thoroughness. There was a distinct tendency among the less experienced critics to complain of their sentiments and behavior. Naturally, the author does not share that grievance.

Pigcard's Cottage, January, 1902.







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The author's apology

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